



# Fit WIC Best Practices

## Healthy Lifestyles for ALL Children

- Promote and support healthy lifestyles for ALL children!
- Focus on health, not on weight
- Start early - it's easier to change lifestyle habits at an early age
- Involve the whole family in moving toward healthier habits
- For overweight children, promote an environment where children can be physically active, eat healthy foods until full, and grow into their weight
- Placing children on weight loss diets is seldom safe or effective - it can cause weight cycling, eating disorders and overeating

## Education for WIC Families

### Individual Education

- Help families set goals for health, not for weight
- Help families set goals for healthy eating: eating a variety of foods, having regular meals and snacks, responding to body signals of hunger and fullness, creating a positive environment for meals, enjoying family meals together
- Help families set goals for physical activity: children playing actively at least one hour a day, and limiting television and other "screen time" to less than two hours per day
- Avoid using the terms "overweight" or "obese" - some alternative approaches: "his weight has been growing faster than his height", "it looks like her weight has been going up lately", "how do you feel about how he's been growing?"
- Focus on a healthy lifestyle for the whole family - not on weight changes for an overweight child
- Help families overcome barriers to healthy lifestyles
- Help parents deal with their own issues and struggles with weight and body image
- Support and build on the family's current healthy lifestyle habits
- Nurture children's self-esteem and positive body image
- Support parenting skills (like setting limits and supporting self-esteem), and help parents model healthy behaviors for their children

## Education for WIC Families (continued)

### Group Education

- Do not put overweight children into a separate group - this can lead to labeling, and ALL children need to learn healthy eating and activity habits
- Help families share their ideas and experiences
- Give parents opportunities to explore ways to help their children improve their diets, increase physical activity, and decrease TV watching
- Emphasize "problem solving" rather than "information giving"
- Help families learn easy and fun ways to be active at home - make it "active play" not "exercise" - explore low-cost and homemade toys
- Include children in activities as much as possible
- Offer "how to" physical activity and cooking demonstrations, healthy and easy recipes, gardening activities, etc.
- Use learner-centered approaches, open questions and active listening, family-centered education, facilitated group discussion

## Support for WIC Staff

WIC staff are the best role models for WIC families! Support staff to make healthy lifestyle choices.

- Start a staff wellness program
- Encourage healthy potlucks and healthy snacks
- Organize walking groups; provide pedometers for staff
- Include activity breaks during meetings and training sessions
- Work with staff on their own issues and concerns related to weight and body image
- Use learner-centered techniques for staff meetings and training sessions
- Train staff in learner-centered techniques for participant education

## Community Efforts

Join with other groups to work toward changes in your community and schools to help prevent overweight.

- Organize to make healthy foods more available and affordable: community gardens, farmers markets, access to supermarkets
- Work to improve safety of and access to recreation areas: parks, playgrounds, walking and biking paths, ball courts, etc.
- Help to make physical activity classes accessible and affordable for low-income families
- Develop a community physical activity resource guide